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AUTHOR	Denton, David R.
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ABSTRACT

Teachers and administrators often note that preservice programs do not prepare future teachers adequately to teach reading. Several Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) states have addressed this problem. In 1997, the Georgia Professional Standards Review Commission began examining reading certification requirements and found that most teacher education programs did not require enough reading. The Commission is exploring ways to ensure that preservice teachers receive adequate content in reading. The University System of Georgia is making program improvements in reading and mathematics. Maryland's Department of Education convened a task force in 1998 to work on changes in reading content requirements for Maryland teachers. The new regulations apply to all students enrolling in Maryland teacher education programs. The North Carolina Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction revised the Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts to provide detailed guidance on how to teach phonemic awareness and phonics. All teacher education programs must regularly demonstrate that they cover all required competencies. In Texas, a special committee of the State Board for Teacher Certification is developing revised certification requirements in reading. The Texas Education Agency has funded a Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University of Austin. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is reviewing teacher education programs offered by public universities. Other SREB states are also working on improvements in reading instruction. (SM)

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Focus *on Teacher Education in Reading*

SREB

David R. Denton

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Southern Regional Education Board

592 10th St. N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 875-9211
www.sreb.org

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Reading instruction in elementary schools has become a high-priority issue in many states. One of the most frequently asked questions about reading is "How well do education programs prepare future teachers to teach reading?" Too often, the answer from both administrators and teachers has been "Not very well." Several SREB states have addressed this problem.

Georgia

In 1997, the Georgia Professional Standards Review Commission, which recommends standards for teacher certification in the state, began looking at certification requirements in reading. A survey of the 34 teacher-education programs in Georgia found that most required only one course in reading for students preparing for early childhood certification (prekindergarten to grade five).

Suspecting that reading also might be imbedded in courses not specifically focused on reading, the commission conducted another survey to determine how much total instructional time was devoted to reading. The survey found that the average time spent on reading was 17.8 percent of the teacher education curriculum, but the range among institutions was dramatic — from 2 percent to 30 percent!

The commission subsequently has been exploring ways to ensure that students preparing to be teachers receive adequate content in reading, whether in specific courses or as components of other courses. The commission also may recommend a one-year postbaccalaureate internship for all new teachers. In addition, it believes that the current prekindergarten to grade five certification should be split into separate certifications for prekindergarten to grade two and grades three to five. Many rural school districts oppose this idea, however, because they fear it would complicate the task of recruiting teachers.

Meanwhile, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, which operates accredited teacher-education programs at 15 public colleges and universities, has been forging ahead. In April 1998, the board approved a new policy to "guarantee" the performance of graduates of its programs in early childhood, elementary and secondary educa-

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tion, with particular attention to effective teaching of reading and mathematics. Teachers who fail to demonstrate competency in their area of specialization within two years of graduation will be retrained by their alma mater at no cost to the teachers or the employing school districts.

In July 1998, the regents went further, adopting a recommendation by University System Chancellor Stephen Portch that will require those who major in early childhood education (prekindergarten to grade five certification) to minor in reading and math. Middle school majors will be required to minor in two of four areas — language arts, math, science and social studies. It is expected that the new requirements will be implemented for students entering programs in fall 1999. In addition, the Board of Regents, the Georgia Professional Standards Review Commission and 11 of the 15 teacher-education programs in the system are collaborating to offer a reading "endorsement" for all K-12 teachers. The endorsement, which is intended for classroom teachers as opposed to reading specialists, will require a specified series of courses in reading. This endorsement is expected to be available as of January 1999 and will be offered in part via distance learning technology.

Maryland

A series of articles on reading in the Baltimore Sun over the last year focused attention on the way education schools prepare future teachers to teach reading. Among the concerns was that education students in Maryland have been required to take only one course in reading to be eligible for certification in early childhood or elementary education. Middle school and high school teachers have not been required to take any reading courses.

In April 1998, a special task force formed by the Maryland Department of Education proposed changes in the reading content requirements for current and future Maryland teachers. The revised standards were presented to the state Board of Education, which gave them preliminary approval in July.

The new Maryland regulations require 12 semester hours in reading for all regular and special-education teachers at the early childhood and elementary levels, and six hours at the secondary level. The new requirements will apply to all students enrolling in Maryland teacher-education programs beginning in the fall of 1998. Students who already were enrolled in teacher-education programs will be allowed to graduate after fulfilling the requirements in effect when they enrolled, but they must complete the additional reading coursework in order to renew their certificates. Current teachers will have two renewal periods (10 years for experienced teachers) to complete the additional courses.

North Carolina

Under its Comprehensive Plan for Reading, adopted in 1997, the North Carolina Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction revised the Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts to provide detailed guidance on how to teach phonemic awareness (the understanding that words are made up of distinct identifiable sounds) and phonics (word recognition skills). The revisions, developed with the help of university faculty, formed the basis for a review of reading instruction in college and university teacher-education programs.

Under the reading plan, each teacher-education program identified curriculum revisions during the 1997-98 academic year that would ensure "that teachers, kindergarten through third grade in particular, possess the broad base of knowledge and skills ... to enable them to provide the reading approach necessary and appropriate for a wide range of ability levels among students." Each program in a public college or university submitted a report to the state Board of Education demonstrating that necessary changes had been made. At the same time, the state's Competencies for Elementary Teachers were revised to include more specific requirements in phonemic awareness and phonics. All teacher-education programs, both public and private, regularly are required to demonstrate to the Department of Public Instruction that they cover all of the competencies in their programs. Any program that fails to do so will be given a limited time to make necessary changes or face the prospect of being closed down.

In addition, the University of North Carolina central administration has proposed that system universities that offer teacher-education programs develop a concentration in reading. The UNC Governing Board has not yet taken final action on the proposal.

Texas

Under the state's new Accountability System for Educator Preparation, every educational institution that prepares teachers (including colleges and universities and a variety of alternative programs) will be "accredited" by the state Board for Teacher Certification based on its graduates' initial performance on state certification exams. Initial ratings of teacher preparation programs based on graduates' overall performance on all certification exams were released in September 1998. Of the 86 programs in the state, 51 received accreditation status, while 35 were rated "accredited under review," indicating that they failed to meet the state standards. These programs will have three years to meet the standards and will receive special assistance in doing so. A special committee of the board is developing revised certification requirements in reading. It is expected that by 2001 it will be possible to measure graduates' performance in specific content areas, including reading.

As part of Governor George Bush's statewide reading initiative, the Texas Education Agency also has funded a Center for Reading and Language Arts at The University of Texas at Austin. The center is to create a coordinated system for teacher education and professional development in these areas.

In addition, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is reviewing teacher-education programs offered by public universities. The objective of the review is to compare reading content in elementary-education programs across the state and to ensure that all programs give future teachers a wide range of instructional tools to enable them to meet every child's needs, including phonemic awareness and phonics.

Other states

The **Alabama** Department of Education has established a task force to look at teacher preparation in reading. Faculty of teacher education programs participated in a summer 1998 reading academy for teachers and administrators at 16 elementary schools that are being funded as Literacy Demonstration Sites for the 1998-99 school year. Each of the 16 schools has a higher education institution as a partner. The department also plans to offer a one-week professional-development program in reading for 100 teacher-education faculty members in March 1999.

In **Louisiana**, a committee of dyslexia coordinators from local school districts, university reading specialists and education school deans is studying reading content in teacher preparation programs and is expected to report to the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in October.

In **Mississippi**, an education alliance is looking at teacher education programs and certification requirements, with an emphasis on reading. The alliance — which includes representatives of teacher training programs, the state Department of Education, the Institutions of Higher Learning, community colleges and the Public Education Forum — began its work on this topic in summer 1998.

In **Tennessee**, a committee that includes representatives of universities and local school systems is working with the state Board of Education, the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services to revise the state's teacher licensure standards in early childhood education (prekindergarten to grade four). The goal is to bring the teacher licensure standards up to date so that they reflect recent research findings, including those involving beginning reading instruction.

While several states are reviewing teacher preparation in reading, the question remains about how best to provide all teachers with a full range of needed skills. In coming months, the SREB will be working with education school faculty and reading researchers to try to find an answer.